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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000074

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UNFICYP](#) [TU](#) [CY](#)  
SUBJECT: MISSING PERSONS COMMITTEE OPTIMISTIC ON RETURN OF  
REMAINS, BUT JITTERY ABOUT POSSIBLE BACKLASH

REF: 06 NICOSIA 1794 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The Tripartite Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) is making steady progress exhuming and identifying Greek and Turkish Cypriots missing since 1963-1974. Pledges from the USG and other donors have ensured sufficient funding for operations to continue well into 2008, and CMP members expect to begin returning remains to families seeking "closure" in the first quarter of 2007. The CMP is the most successful bicomunal venture on Cyprus, and has been able to function thanks to political buy-in from both community leaders. This commitment appears to be holding. While the CMP's mandate explicitly forbids it from considering questions of criminal guilt, Committee members are aware that the return of victims' remains may stir up political acrimony and legal disputes -- and are considering strategies to minimize the negative effect this may have on their future work. More worrying is a series of anonymous threats against the CMP from a shadowy group in the north. This has raised fears of a Turkish Cypriot nationalist backlash against the Committee, especially as exhumations begin to focus more exclusively on Greek Cypriot graves in the "TRNC." These threats, together with other signs of increased tension in the north, may be an early warning of resurgent nationalist feeling -- and could portend further difficulties in relations between the pro-settlement "President" Talat and local representatives of the Turkish "Deep State." END SUMMARY.

CMP: A RARE SUCCESS STORY

¶2. (SBU) The Tripartite CMP (which consists of a UN, Greek Cypriot, and Turkish Cypriot member) continues to make steady progress. Established to determine the fate of Cypriots (approximately 1500 G/Cs and 500 T/Cs) missing since the decade of conflict in 1963-74, the Committee overcame years of political deadlock in 2005/6, thanks in large part to the advent of a more conciliatory Turkish Cypriot "government." International donations and the appointment of a dynamic, new UN Third Member facilitated the start of long-delayed investigations and exhumations -- as well as the construction of dedicated forensic anthropology and genetic testing facilities (reftel).

¶3. (SBU) With its mandate focused only on the identification of remains (and not on identifying killers), the CMP has so far favorable reviews from both communities as a useful humanitarian vehicle for "closure." According to a December 2006 report issued by the Third (UN) Member, Christophe Girod, over 100 remains have been exhumed so far -- the vast majority of which have also been genetically tested. CMP's objective is to begin returning remains to bereaved families in the first quarter of 2007. Construction is reportedly moving ahead for a "Family Reception Center" next to the

CMP's facility in the UN Buffer Zone, where remains would be handed over.

14. (SBU) In subsequent conversations with us, Girod echoed this optimistic assessment of the CMP's progress so far. Girod thanked the U.S. for its \$150,000 donation (to fund DNA identification of remains). Other donors (including the European Commission, Spain, Germany, Ireland, the UK, and even Turkey) have joined in, pledging enough for the CMP to continue full-scale operations well into 2008. Cash contributions from the GOC -- as well as in-kind contributions of vehicles, office equipment, diggers, and manpower from the Turkish Cypriot side -- were also important.

15. (C) These contributions, Girod added, reflected a political decision by the leaders of both communities to support the CMP -- both as a means to satisfy those constituents eager to learn the fate of their missing loved ones, and as a way to bolster their own image as humanitarian-minded statesmen. Some political posturing continued, he admitted, including a silly spat over whether to use Greek or Turkish place names in CMP public documents (resolved when the members agreed to use only English names in their paperwork, and to drop by-name geographic references altogether when an English name did not exist). Nonetheless, political buy-in from the top had translated into a remarkably harmonious and collegial working relationship between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot members and their staff.

16. (C) In separate meetings with us, the Greek and Turkish Cypriot members generally agreed with Girod's upbeat assessment of their working relationship, but each cast mirror-image aspersions on what they believed to be the not-so-hidden political agenda of the other side's

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political leadership. Each suspects the other of using the CMP for tactical political advantage, rather than viewing it as a genuine tool for reconciliation. But fortunately, this mutual suspicion has not evolved into a material obstacle to cooperation within the CMP.

DIFFICULT WATERS AHEAD?  
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17. (C) Despite the rosy budget and operational prospects for 2007-2008, CMP members still express concern that the return of remains could reopen old wounds. All three members privately acknowledge that although CMP reports deliberately exclude cause-of-death information that might point fingers to specific perpetrators, distraught families could use the reports they receive from the CMP (or even forensic evidence on the remains themselves) to file criminal charges or make inflammatory public accusations about the other side. If this were to happen, the pragmatic political cease-fire that has allowed the CMP to function successfully could quickly fall apart, they suggest.

18. (C) Already, said Turkish Cypriot member Gulden Plumer Kucuk, one high-profile Turkish Cypriot journalist was publishing dramatic investigative articles about the missing. The articles (while "accurate and well researched") served to focus public opinion on questions of guilt. The danger, Plumer Kucuk suggested, was that victims' families (as well as those with "something to hide" from their past) could be "radicalized" by the search for the missing -- even as the bicomunal CMP was trying to stress "closure" and reconciliation.

19. (C) Therefore, Greek Cypriot member Elias Georgiades told us, the CMP was taking a careful look at its public relations and media strategy before it started handing back remains. A respectful and low-key approach to this delicate task, he said, would help bolster the CMP's reputation and moderate public expectations. According to Georgiades, the CMP would first give back remains to families who were not "volatile"

-- and who would therefore set the appropriate tone for other relatives to follow. He felt certain that Greek Cypriot political parties and victims' associations would encourage moderation among their members and the media, but was far from certain the Turkish Cypriots would do the same. Predictably, Plumer Kucuk voiced the opposite concern.

#### DEEP STATE BACKLASH?

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¶10. (C) Both Girod and Plumer Kucuk also expressed unease over a December incident in the Turkish Cypriot village of Serdarli ("Chatos" in Greek). Anonymous pamphlets attributed to the "Turkish Revenge Brigade" warned locals not to cooperate with the CMP (which, the pamphlet claimed, "paid dollars" to those to give evidence); subsequently, several members of Plumer Kucuk's staff have received threatening phone calls. Girod and Plumer Kucuk both felt that the "TRNC" police had responded appropriately by investigating the threat and offering enhanced protection for CMP staff and work sites. Furthermore, some previously hesitant villagers responded to the threats with defiance, coming forward to give evidence about the location of Greek Cypriot graves in the town. Nonetheless, the CMP had decided to postpone further operations in Serdarli, moving their work to sites elsewhere until "tempers in the village cooled."

¶11. (C) Plumer Kucuk was reluctant to assign blame for the Serdarli threats -- although she did concede that the pamphlets were "well written and professionally done," and probably not just the work of idle cranks. She noted that Serdarli was an especially "sensitive" site for Turkish Cypriots because of the particularly brutal fighting and reprisal killings that had taken place there in 1974. Plumer Kucuk said she could "not dismiss" widespread rumors that retired police and military personnel resident in Serdarli (allegedly backed by sympathetic elements still active in the Turkish security forces) were behind the threats -- which were supposedly designed to divert attention from former Turkish Cypriot militia fighters, still living in the village, with civilian blood on their hands.

¶12. (C) Plumer Kucuk went on to voice her concern that, in the coming 1-2 years, the atmosphere in the north would turn more hostile to the CMP -- and that threats like this could intensify. With over half of the 500-plus Turkish Cypriot missing now "more or less located," the CMP would be unable to continue much longer the delicate ethnic balancing act it has followed so far (where each dig of Greek Cypriot bones in the north has been balanced by a corresponding dig of Turkish Cypriot bones in the south). Soon, only Greek Cypriot bones

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would remain, and the focus of digging would shift inexorably to the north (and, eventually, to sites on land currently controlled by the Turkish Army). This would lead average Turkish Cypriots -- to say nothing of nefarious "Deep State" types in the security forces -- to view the CMP as an increasingly one-sided, "meddling" exercise focused entirely on Turkish wrongdoing, she predicted. Any lawsuits, "sensationalist press coverage," or other finger-pointing from the south would only aggravate this trend. Although Plumer Kucuk was quick to add that "President" Talat remained fully supportive of her work and her independence, she wondered whether his ability to back the CMP was sustainable in the long term.

#### COMMENT

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¶13. (C) The CMP is an important humanitarian undertaking. Whether the political support it enjoys from the two community leaders is heartfelt or merely tactical is almost beside the point -- as one of the few comparative bright spots in bicomunal relations, neither side feels it can afford to abandon cooperation with the CMP at this point.

For this reason, the CMP seems likely to benefit from continued international support. There are medium-term reasons to worry, however. Even if the CMP handles the return of remains this spring with the utmost care, the odds are still pretty good that, after receiving the bones of their loved ones, at least some bereaved Cypriots could upset the apple cart with acrimonious litigation and public recrimination aimed at the other side.

¶14. (C) Furthermore, as exhumations begin to focus more exclusively on the north, the CMP seems set for continued friction with former Turkish Cypriot militia fighters and their allies in the security forces. How Talat handles this tension will be a key barometer of his political strength. Given the current friction between him and the "Deep State" (over the Ledra Street bridge, control of law enforcement/security, and how to handle the Cyprus problem), supporting the CMP through the tougher times ahead may prove as difficult as it is essential. END COMMENT.  
SCHLICHER